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ABSTRACT

Project CREDIT (Certification Renewal Experiences Designed to Improve Teaching) is a cooperative program between Indiana State University and 10 school districts in west-central Indiana. The program was initiated to assist first-year teachers with the objectives of reducing teacher dropout and improving the quality of teaching. Twenty first-year teachers were participants in the program, which was funded by Indiana's Teacher Quality Act. The program strategy was to use a multiple-support system for first-year teachers. Each intern was assigned to an experienced teacher in the building who provided assistance and supervision. University supervisors made monthly visits and coordinated inservice activities. Peer support was provided through monthly seminars and a newsletter. The program showed evidence of improved teaching performance and reduced teacher dropout. All 20 first-year teachers elected to remain in teaching. According to national statistics, 13 percent leave after the first year of teaching. Interns showed significantly better performance in 40 teaching skills when compared to a group of first-year teachers who did not have support. Several features of the program have been incorporated into the "A+" education act by the 1987 legislature. All future teachers in Indiana will have the benefit of a mentor and many will also have the support of university personnel and peers. (JD)

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PROJECT CREDIT

CERTIFICATION RENEWAL EXPERIENCES DESIGNED TO IMPROVE TEACHING

A
COOPERATIVE
MULTIPLE-SUPPORT PROGRAM
FOR FIRST-YEAR TEACHERS
BETWEEN
INDIANA STATE UNIVERSITY AND
TEN PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS

FINALIST FOR THE
DISTINGUISHED PROGRAM IN TEACHER EDUCATION AWARD
ASSOCIATION OF TEACHER EDUCATORS
FEBRUARY, 1988

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SP029789

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PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND DESCRIPTION

Project CREDIT was developed to enhance teacher quality through a support system for first-year teachers involving mentoring from highly competent classroom teachers, university supervision and assistance, and peer support. The underlying assumption of the program was that teacher education is incomplete without a supervised first year of teaching and that university and public school need to collaborate in providing such support. It has been found that no matter how well-trained, new teachers experience "reality shock" when they are alone in the classroom for the first time. The impact of this experience may wash out knowledge learned and skills attained in the formal college training. In order to compensate for this, preparation must extend from the university into the public school during the first year of teaching and universities and public schools must work together if teachers are to develop teaching skills more quickly. It was also assumed that the evidence of poor support and lack of university-public school involvement was illustrated by teacher dropout rates which approach fifty percent or more during the first years of teaching.

Project CREDIT was funded by the state of Indiana and charged to improve the quality of teaching by providing reward, incentive, and recognition to teachers. Under the auspices of the act, a contract was issued to Indiana State University to link to public schools in the area to provide a first-year support system which would focus on improving teacher quality through involvement of both the university and public schools who had first-year teachers. Dr. Marvin A. Henry, Chairperson of the Department of Secondary Education at Indiana State University, was project director.

Twenty interns and 19 mentors (one mentor worked with two interns) were selected from 15 schools in the following school districts in the area normally serviced by Indiana State University. The school districts were:

1. Clay Community Schools, Knightsville, IN - A consolidated rural district.
2. Gibault School for Boys, Terre Haute, IN - A private church-related institution whose mission is the rehabilitation of boys age 12-16.
3. Indiana State University School, Terre Haute, IN - The laboratory school for Indiana State University.
4. North Gibson School Corporation, Princeton, IN - A consolidated school district in the southern part of the ISU service area with a reputation for forward-looking programs.
5. Rockville Community Schools, Rockville, IN - A school corporation which has a nucleus of students from the city of Rockville along with a number of students in the surrounding rural area.
6. South Knox School Corporation, Monroe City, IN - A consolidation of three rural communities where teacher turnover is somewhat higher than larger districts.
7. South Putnam Community Schools, Greencastle, IN - A district similar to South Knox, except it is located east of Indiana State University instead of south.
8. Southwest Sullivan School Corporation, Sullivan, IN - A stable school district in a county-seat town.
9. Vigo County School Corporation, Terre Haute, IN - An urban school district located in the same city as Indiana State

University.

10. Vincennes Community School Corporation, Vincennes, IN - The second-largest district in the area served by the program.

The above school districts agreed to participate when the program was explained to them by the director. The first twenty first-year teachers who were employed in these districts were invited to participate in the program. The new teachers elected to participate because of the promise of support during the first year and also because they were granted six hours of tuition-free university credit for a course entitled teaching internship.

Program Goals

Project CREDIT concentrated on the support of first-year teachers through a multiple support program from both public school and university personnel. Specifically, the goals of the program were to:

1. Link universities and public schools in teacher education.
2. Improve teaching skills of first-year teachers.
3. Reduce the problems of beginning teachers.
4. Reduce teacher dropout.
5. Decrease teacher burnout.
6. Reward superior teachers.

A Steering Committee was appointed by the director to assist in the development of program guidelines, offer suggestions for a strong program, and to provide guidance from a broad spectrum of teaching practice. The committee was composed of a personnel director from a large school system, a junior/senior high school principal, two high school teachers, one junior high school teacher, and two university professors, including the director. The Steering Committee reviewed the proposal and the

guidelines for the program which had been prepared by the project director. They met in several late afternoon sessions to plan all aspects of the program. Their suggestions ranged from guidelines for selecting mentors to desirable growth activities for both interns and mentors. There was spirited discussion on a number of issues as the views of administrators, teachers, and professors focused on a problem related to the education of teachers. The dialogue proved productive as consensus was ultimately reached on all the major concerns. In order to have first-hand experience with the program, several members of the Steering Committee attended various activities throughout the year.

One of the goals of Project CREDIT was to provide a mentor for an intern who was considered to be an outstanding teacher. The assumption was that a new teacher would profit more from the example of a highly skilled teacher. One of the first tasks of the Steering Committee was to determine the criteria on which outstanding teachers would be selected. After review of teacher characteristics and considerable discussion, the following criteria were established for the selection of mentors who would guide interns.

Required Criteria

1. Hold an Indiana Professional Teaching License (a master's degree and a minimum of three years teaching experience).
2. A minimum of five years teaching experience.
3. Has had teaching experience in the building where he/she will serve as mentor (minimum of two years suggested).
4. Recognized as an effective teacher on the criteria used by the school district to evaluate teachers.

5. Willing to devote extra time to the supervision of an intern.

Desirable Attributes

1. Has skills in classroom management and discipline, pupil motivation, individualizing instruction, presenting content, and time management.
2. Active professionally.
3. Has had experience in the supervision of student teachers or field participants.
4. Willing to supervise interns in any subject area if necessary.
5. Skilled in working on a one-to-one basis, especially in conference situations.
6. Perceptive, open, and a good listener.
7. Willing to allow an intern to observe his/her classes.
8. Has a high level of commitment to teaching and a positive outlook on the profession in general.
9. Has the capacity to be aware of what is happening in a classroom and how to modify the procedure, if necessary.
10. Is concerned about the school environment for all teachers.
11. Has empathy for people and looks for ways to help them.
12. Has the ability and willingness to work cooperatively with other professionals.

School principals were requested to review the criteria and to nominate teachers who met them. The teacher was then contacted and invited to particpate as a mentor in the event that the school had a vacancy. A stipend of $2000 was to be paid to the mentors, but no time was to be released from teaching responsibilities to serve as an intern mentor. The initial correspondence explained as well that mentors were

to support teachers but were not be be their evaluators.

When a first-year teacher was employed, the project director consulted with the principal and a mentor was selected from the pool of persons who had been nominated and had agreed to be a mentor. Consideration was given to teachers who taught the same subject area as the intern, but the overriding criterion was the judgment of the ability of the two people to work together.

Mentors participated in various parts of the orientation program and worked with the project director in determining guidelines for the support of interns. Given a broad outline of mentor responsibilities, they agreed on 32 guidelines in the following areas of support:

1. Helping the intern during the initial days.
2. Assistance in planning.
3. Scheduling meetings between interns and mentors.
4. Observations of interns by mentors and observations of mentors by interns.
5. Help in the routine aspects of teaching.
6. Inservice meetings for mentors.
7. How to serve as a model for interns.
8. Assistance in critical aspects of teaching.
9. University involvement.

These guidelines served as operating procedures for the duration of the program. A more complete description of the responsibilities and guidelines is contained in the appendix.

A team of university consultants was selected to assist the interns, mentors, and program director. The consultants were chosen because of their expertise in areas identified to be potential problem areas for

beginning teachers: classroom management and discipline, teaching methods and techniques, testing and evaluation, human relations, and using the computer as an instructional tool. Each consultant made two presentations to the participants during the academic year and all were available to assist individual interns as requested.

Interns were supervised by two university supervisors who have considerable experience supervising student teachers. Each supervisor worked with half of the interns during the school year and made monthly site visits.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

Five orientation days were scheduled during the initial weeks of the program. The first two days were scheduled prior to the opening of school. The first orientation day involved getting acquainted, explaining the program, and developing guidelines for mentors and a professional development plan for the interns.

The second day was reserved for the mentor and intern to work together in their respective schools. A checklist of suggested orientation ideas was given to the interns and mentors who were to use them to help the intern become acquainted with the school setting (see appendix). Another task for the second day was for the intern and mentor to work together in the preparation of the intern's first week of lessons.

The third day was on a Saturday early in September when four of the five consultants gave presentations to the interns and mentors. Each consultant had approximately an hour and a half to orient the teachers concerning his area of expertise and to offer practical suggestions for coping with problems in those areas.

The fourth and fifth orientation days followed on a weekend two

weeks later and only involved the interns. The consultant in human relations directed the session which focused on the development of human relation skills. The interns came to know each other very well in this setting.

The program developed with multiple support from university and public school personnel. Persons from both institutions had specific roles to play and enhanced the quality of the work of the other.

Support from a public school mentor was considered to be a key element in the potential for success of Project CREDIT. Mentors were to be role models, supervisors, supporters, and counselors. This complex role was demanding but one which they seemed to welcome and enjoy. A considerable amount of mentor activity focused on informational and coping activities. Mentors acquainted interns with school policies and procedures and helped them to know the culture of the school and to get acquainted with the kinds of responsibilities teachers have. In addition, they provided formative supervision ranging from suggestions concerning content and discussion of plans to observation of classes and analysis of the classroom activity. Most of all, they were available to answer questions when an intern needed an answer and were available daily, if needed.

As indicated previously, university support came in the form of formative supervision and consultant service. University supervisors made monthly site visits to the schools. On most occasions, they observed the interns at work in their classrooms. This observation was usually proceded and followed by a supervisory conference. Supervisors concentrated on a collegial stance facilitating the work of the intern instead of taking a more direct role as supervisor and evaluator. The university supervisors conferred with principals, mentors, and interns on all visits.

Typical conversations included the progress of the intern, the role of the mentor, and ways in which an intern could be further supported. On some occasions, university supervisors served as liaison persons or ombudsmen when difficulties arose between persons in the public school setting. The presence of a person who was not directly involved in the governance of the school seemed to have been appreciated by all participants.

Consultants from the ISU School of Education were available when needed, but their major activities involved making two presentations and writing an occasional column in the project Newsletter. The consultants also attended the monthly dinner seminars and talked individually with several of the interns.

The third component of the multiple support system involved peer support. This was an opportunity for interns to share ideas with and help each other. The most popular activity was the monthly dinner seminar. The interns met at a local restaurant once a month with the university supervisors and consultants. The schedule included ample time for interns to converse with each. After a period of time, programs were scheduled which focused on their problems and again provided time for dialogue and problem sharing. Throughout the year there was emphasis on discipline, human relations, teaching methods, evaluation, computer utilization in the classroom, and a summary meeting where certificates of achievement were presented to the interns. Peer support has been noted to be one of the best types of activities for intern growth, and the participation of the group seemed to show support for such activity.

Mentors were invited to join in the dinner seminars on four occasions. This provided the opportunity for them to interact with other mentors and to share ideas and concerns with each other and with

the university supervisors and consultants.

Peer support was also evident through a monthly newsletter (see appendix). This publication was prepared by the university staff and it provided a vehicle of communication for the participants in Project CREDIT. Each newsletter contained articles which focused on teaching skills and other activities associated with professional development. In addition, it served to coordinate the schedule of activities.

In summary, the program was implemented through a series of pre-teaching seminars, inservice activities, and formative supervision. The pre-teaching seminars focused on orientation, socialization, and development of specific criteria to guide the program. Inservice activities involved interns, university supervisors and consultants, and mentors and were delivered through monthly dinner seminars and the project newsletter and focused on problems typically faced by first-year teachers. Formative supervision was provided by university supervisors and mentors. Supervisors visited the schools monthly, observed the interns teach and conferred with the interns and mentors.

Throughout the program, the participants stressed a collegial approach between university and public school participants. Critical decisions about the program were made by participants in both instituions. When interns experienced teaching problems, university supervisors worked with building principals and the mentors to bring about reconciliation.

EVALUATION

The program was evaluated by an internal evaluator (Dr. Jerry Summers, ISU), an external evaluator (Dr. Mary Quilling, Advanced Technology, INc.), and by the project director.

The internal evaluation plan was designed to measure the extent to which project personnel accomplished the stated objectives and to measure changes in intern attitudes and perceptions during the course of the program.

Accomplishment of the evaluation plan was approached through the creation of several questionnaires that were administered to first-year teachers (control group), interns, mentors, and principals. Intern attitudes and perceptions toward teaching attributes were measured monthly by the Project CREDIT Professional Evaluation Form. First-year teachers who were not interns were also asked to complete on a pre- and post- basis. These assessments were made at the beginning and the end of the 1986-87 academic school year and were used for control purposes. Interns and mentors were also asked to complete a Project CREDIT Program at the conclusion of the academic year.

The responses were completed on an optical scanner form and all assessments were made using the Statistical Package for the Social Studies (SPSSX). The data were synthesized into three sections as follows:

1. Monitoring of intern perceptions of ideal and self teaching attributes.
2. Comparison of pre- and post- intern perceptions of ideal and self teaching attributes with a set of pre- and post- control group responses.
3. Assessment of intern perceptions of project administration and program effectiveness.

The external evaluator asked the interns and mentors to respond to written statements and questions on two occasions. In addition, she

attended several of the group meetings and made site visits to several of the schools.

The project director submitted a questionnaire to interns and mentors at the conclusion of the program asking them to indicate what was particularly helpful and what needed to be improved. The results of the evaluations are described below in response to the stated objectives:

1. Link universities and public schools in teacher education. The internal evaluation revealed that mentor teachers and university supervisors were found to complement each other in the kinds of support they were able to give to the interns. Mentors assisted the intern in understanding problems peculiar to the school and university supervisors provided a surprising amount of personal and professional assistance that helped the beginner overcome problems generically associated with first-year teaching. All interns, mentors, and principals reported that university supervisors were helpful in fostering the growth of first-year teachers. The external evaluator reported that interns and mentors were very positive about university-public school support. The project director found a high level of support for the program. All participants (interns, mentors, and principals) felt that the program should be continued and that university support was a key to making the induction year effective.

2. Improve teaching skills of first-year teachers. The internal evaluator analyzed data in two ways in looking at changes in teaching skills. The first analysis was to ask if end-of-year gain scores varied between the interns and the control group. The results indicated that the interns demonstrated statistically favorable differences in

a. the use of mastery learning and mastery learning theory.

b. increased motivation to use higher order questions.

c. increased inclination to teach critical thinking skills.

d. increased awareness of state and local curriculum guides.

e. enhanced ability to communicate with parents.

f. improved ability to communicate with the pubic at large.

The second method was to determine whether there was a significant difference from beginning to end for each group and, if so, in what direction. Results showed favorable significant differences for the interns in 33 variables. There were similar changes in the experimental and control groups for 14 variables and one in which the control group seemed to be more favorable. A complete summary of this analysis may be found in the appendix.

3. Reduce the problems of beginning teachers. The evaluation procedures provided revealing perceptions of first-year teachers. The data showed that beginning teachers enter their first year of teaching with idealistic perceptions of themselves and of teaching. Many of those ideas were challenged by problems, routines, or people associated with the school.

The CREDIT program was successful in intercepting declines in teaching attitudes. Control group comparisons revealed that intern teachers completed the year with significantly healthier attitudes and perceptions about teaching than did a similar group of beginning teachers who did not have the CREDIT support program.

The external evaluator reported that various activities of the program helped to reduce the problems experienced by beginning teachers. This seemed to result especially from some of the seminars and through the nature of the support system from university supervisors and mentors.

4. Reduce teacher dropout. A preliminary needs assessment revealed that 26.5 percent of Indiana teachers who entered teaching had dropped out within two years; a total of 62 percent had dropped out within five years. All CREDIT intern teachers indicated a desire to remain in teaching

for several years. A follow-up has revealed that all 20 teachers in the experimental program have remained in teaching for a second year.

5. Decrease teacher burnout. The preliminary needs assessment revealed that salary was a problem in keeping certified teachers within the profession, but so was classroom management, difficulty in providing for individual differences, coping with students who have reading difficulties, maintaining order in the classroom, and inability to ask higher order questions--factors which can cause burnout. When the responses of intern teachers were compared with the responses of the control group, the intern teachers were found to have significantly superior question-asking skills. All interns reported that they had good managerial skills and maintained good classroom discipline. All reported that their mentors had assisted them in understanding the special needs student. Given these positive responses, it appears that intern teachers may experience less burnout because they have achieved success in teaching. Principals reported that mentor teachers improved during the year and showed more interest in teaching through their work with interns.

6. Reward superior teachers. The final objective had to do with rewarding exceptional teachers. The visibility of serving as a mentor teacher was planned to be a positive, reinforcing stimulation. All mentors were reported by interns to be respected by their colleagues.

The intern evaluation data revealed that the objectives of the project were met and all participating personnel believed they had personally prospered as a result of their participation activities. All indicated that they would participate in the program again under similar circumstances.

The total scenario developed by Project CREDIT seems to point to the fact that multiple support provides a more effective procedure for teacher

induction than single support systems. Mentor support is enhanced through the assistance of university personnel. University assistance is helpful to interns, mentors and administrators. Peer support allows communication and help from persons in similar circumstances. Most importantly, multiple support extends teacher education into the first year under controlled situations with responsibility being accepted by teacher education institutions as well as public schools.

ADAPTABILITY TO OTHER PROGRAMS

The linkage between Indiana State University and the public schools was evident in many ways. In the first place, the basic activities were planned jointly by public school and university personnel. The project director and the school principal worked together in selecting mentors. They later worked together and consulted when there were particular problems associated with an intern. Interns were exposed to a mentor and a university supervisor who collaborated to facilitate their growth. University personnel were able to observe first-hand the conditions, problems and opportunities of the first-year teacher and to analyze the impact of teacher-education programs in preparation for that first year. Public schools were able to capitalize on the opportunity to learn from the expertise and broader perspective of university personnel in their own activities associated with the first year of teaching. All in all, mutual respect seemed to be evident throughout the program. In fact, all participants argued for the continuation of an intern program and strongly supported the idea of university involvement as a necessary component of a successful program.

According to the external evaluator, Project CREDIT is a program that should be easily adapted to another teacher education institution.

She stated in her final report that, "The program was well organized and documented, thereby making it replicable by other institutions..."

The following procedures should facilitate replicability:

1. Involve university and public school personnel (administrators and teachers) early in an advisory and a developmental role.
2. Establish a legitimate role for university personnel by requiring that interns be enrolled in a university course in internship or some other appropriate field experience course.
3. Work together in the selection and training of mentors.
4. Concentrate on multiple support from university, public school, and peers.
5. De-emphasize formal evaluation as a component of an internship.
6. Hold frequent consultations between key people at the university and public schools.
7. Concentrate on sharing the strengths that each institution can offer to the other.
8. Be sensitive to the schedule and time constraints experienced in the public schools.
9. Stress a collegial approach to supporting interns.
10. Use a variety of activities for support and supervision.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The success of Project CREDIT may best be demonstrated by the fact that it is continuing into the second year without the benefit of external funding. Some principals contacted ISU when they hired new teachers and asked that their first-year teachers be in the program. Twelve first-year teachers were contacted and ten agreed to participate and to pay tuition for six hours of university credit.

In 1987, the state of Indiana enacted a law which will require an internship for all first-year teachers beginning in 1988. The law contains several provisions of the CREDIT program, and some personnel associated with the program (public school teachers, administrators, and the university project director) have been appointed to work in guiding the state Department of Education in developing guidelines and a model program for implementing an internship in the state of Indiana.

The data gathered leads to the conclusion that the program was successful in its goals. It is particularly concluded that Project CREDIT is a model for providing support for first-year teachers from university personnel, public school mentors, and peers which will effect a reduction in teacher dropout. The previously stated assumption that teacher preparation is not complete without an induction year involving multiple support seems to have been proved through Project CREDIT.